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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Forty-fifth session

Report on PARinAC

1. At its forty-fourth session, the Executive Committee requested the High Commissioner to keep it appropriately informed of the follow-up actions to the PARinAC (Partnership in Action) process. The present report complements the information note on PARinAC which was submitted to the Informal Meeting of the Executive Committee on 23 June 1994 concerning the PARinAC Global Conference, held in Oslo from 6-9 June 1994.

2. The Oslo Conference represented the culmination of six regional conferences held in Caracas, Kathmandu, Tunis, Bangkok, Addis Ababa and Budapest over the past year. It adopted a Declaration and Plan of Action containing 134 proposals for strengthened UNHCR-NGO collaboration. This Plan of Action forms the basis of a joint UNHCR-NGO humanitarian agenda to meet the vast refugee challenges worldwide in the coming years. The Declaration also fully endorsed the proposals contained in the reports of each of the regional conferences.

3. A copy of the Declaration and Plan of Action was made available to the Executive Committee at its 23 June 1994 Informal Meeting, as was a copy of the High Commissioner's keynote address to the Oslo Global Conference. In this address, the High Commissioner committed UNHCR - subject to available resources - to implementing a range of proposals from restructuring at UNHCR Headquarters, training and capacity-building of local NGOs, to an assessment, carried out over the past three months, of measures adopted to ensure the follow-up and implementation of the various proposals.

4. Since the Oslo Conference there has been a process of intensive consultations both within UNHCR as well as between NGO representatives and UNHCR field offices. On 30 September 1994, NGO representatives will present to the Executive Committee a series of reports based on preliminary review of the recommendations contained in the Plan of Action conducted by the NGO focal points designated by NGOs represented at Oslo.

5. In this process, NGO PARinAC focal points in Central America, Canada, South Asia, Southern and West Africa have [illegible] discussions between UNHCR and NGOs in the field, with a view to establishing a set of objectives based on the Plan of Action. They have communicated their initial recommendations to the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), which will form the basis of the 30 September reports. ICVA is actively seeking funds to assist the implementation of NGO proposals.

6. The paragraphs that follow provide a summary of the initial steps UNHCR has taken to translate some of the main proposals contained in the Plan of Action into concrete follow-up and measures taken for their implementation.

7. The process of institutional restructuring at Headquarters and in the field, aimed at providing a more effective collaboration and coordination with NGOs, has been completed. The staff of the NGO Section is now located in the Office of the Director of External Relations and the Acting Chief of that Section is now the NGO Coordinator within the Division of External Relations, reporting directly to the Director. A focal point for liaison with NGOs on all operational matters in each region has been designated, at the senior level, in the Regional Bureaux. In addition, each Bureau has identified regional or sub-regional focal points for liaison with NGO partners on all matters regarding follow-up and implementation of the PARinAC process.

8. Briefing sessions and follow-up meetings have been held between UNHCR focal points in the field and national NGOs, relating to the increased role of NGOs in operational activities. These meetings fall within the framework of UNHCR's commitment to consult more closely and more regularly with NGOs, particularly at the local level, and to involve them as far as possible in the formulation of programmes in all relevant areas, including emergency response, repatriation, protection and the internally displaced.

9. In May 1994, a draft Programme and Project Management Handbook for UNHCR's Implementing Partners was distributed to some 25 NGO networks and implementing partners for their views and for discussion. The Handbook hopes to lay the foundations for greater transparency and coordination between UNHCR and NGOs in the formulation of programmes and strategies. It seeks to facilitate an increased knowledge by NGOs, especially local NGOs, of UNHCR's administrative, programme and budgeting procedures to be observed in the implementation of UNHCR funded projects. To date, very few responses have been received. It is expected that the final version of this Handbook, including NGO contributions, will be completed by the end of this year.

10. The multiplicity of crises and the complexity of prevention and solutions have made UNHCR acutely conscious of the need for prompt and effective emergency preparedness and response to potential or developing humanitarian crises. The

PARinAC process stressed that the training and capacity-building of local NGOs is crucial to the ability to respond to humanitarian emergencies and prevent their recurrence. It also highlighted the importance of linking training strategies to capacity-building of local NGOs with a view to facilitating their efficient involvement in protection, assistance and management of UNHCR-NGO humanitarian activities, and optimize the benefits of training.

11. Participants in PARinAC made a strong call for greater cooperation between UNHCR and NGOs in the organization of training seminars on issues relating to response and preparedness in refugee emergencies. UNHCR is currently conducting emergency management training workshops on a regional basis. Priority is being given to regions prone to emergencies and regions which have not yet had the benefit of such training. These training workshops are targeted not only at UNHCR staff, but also at government and NGO counterparts operating in the regions. Since 1991, NGO participation in regionally targeted emergency workshops has increased three-fold. While this trend will be continued, additional human and financial resources are needed in order to conduct short-term training programmes, both before and during emergency situations, to strengthen the response capacity of local agencies.

12. Traditionally, all training activities in core subjects such as protection, programme management, emergency management, voluntary repatriation, social and community development, have been attended jointly by UNHCR and NGO participants. Over 1,000 NGO staff attended UNHCR's training programmes during 1994, and it is anticipated that over 2,000 will have benefited from this type of training by the end of 1994. In line with PARinAC recommendations, programme management; certain types of other training activities for non-UNHCR staff undertaken by offices in the field; and protection training will be budgeted and implemented under operational projects according to priorities defined in UNHCR country operations plans.

13. As regards programme management training courses for UNHCR's implementing partners, offices in the field have been requested to integrate such activities into their country operations plans, as well as to include them in revised 1995 initial project submissions.

14. Offices in the field have also been requested to undertake a training needs assessment and to include in their project submissions, as applicable, proposals for the training of non-UNHCR staff in areas such as voluntary repatriation, registration, resettlement, social services and community development, nutrition and epidemiology and food aid and logistics.

15. In the area of protection training in particular, UNHCR has urged increased emphasis by all field offices on the involvement of UNHCR's implementing partners both as recipients and partners in such activities. UNHCR will reinforce the capacity of its field staff, locally and regionally, to organize training courses in the areas of human rights, refugee law and international humanitarian law, through the development of training material and special training programmes for trainers. However, additional human and financial resources are again needed to establish and/or reinforce protection training coordinators for all regions.

16. Current training strategies are geared at enhancing NGO skills and technical competencies in the handling of specific operations and activities. They must also assist in building and strengthening the institutional capacities of UNHCR's non-governmental partners, particularly local NGOs. The regional and global PARinAC recommendations stress the need for UNHCR to assist in building the capacities of local NGOs to facilitate their greater involvement in devising and implementing reintegration, rehabilitation and development programmes. There is a need to address the gap between initial relief assistance and full reintegration and the gap between the end of UNHCR active involvement and the full establishment of development programmes to integrate refugees into local communities. A key to bridging these gaps lies in building up the capacity of local NGOs to respond to emergency needs and to link their programmes to those of national development counterparts. NGO involvement in such continuum programmes requires extensive capacity-building, a task which calls for other actors to supplement UNHCR's efforts.

17. The flexibility and ability of local NGOs to mobilize quickly, and their ability to reach areas, sometimes inaccessible to international organizations, and their roots in the local community make them particularly important partners, both in terms of emergency response and in reintegration and resettlement activities. The Office has approached international financial and development institutions, such as the World Bank, noting that they can do a great deal in helping to prevent refugee flows by addressing some of the root causes, for instance, through capacity-building of local NGOs and institutions. In the coming months, as a follow-up to NGO-UNHCR assessments in the field and review at Headquarters, UNHCR will contact the World Bank, other international and financial development institutions for funding for capacity-building of local NGOs.

18. These training and capacity-building initiatives are contingent upon present and future priorities and availability of funds, and continue to be subject to existing budgetary and staffing constraints. UNHCR looks forward to greater participation of other United Nations agencies and international NGOs in this area, particularly in providing human and financial resources and sharing experience, in order to strengthen local NGO capacities and skills.

19. Strengthened cooperation and coordination with non-governmental partners in responding to global humanitarian problems calls for a reinforcement and development of mechanisms for the sharing of early warning information. While the PARinAC recommendations acknowledge the importance of early warning mechanisms in emergency preparedness, these also recognize that the impact of such systems is often limited by the absence of interagency information-sharing structures. For its part, UNHCR will continue to provide NGOs with information regarding access and use of existing systems and to increase, expand and provide NGO access to its refugee databases, especially those dealing with country conditions and legal practices.

20. UNHCR's Centre for Documentation on Refugees (CDR), is engaged in the continued development and maintenance of its databases as an easy-to-use electronic library. Current initiatives seek to develop and expand efficient access to external users, and to maintain a continued focus on database development, updates, and quality control. The promotion of the use of and

development of the International Refugee Electronic Network (IRENE) will be continued with direct involvement of NGOs. These activities have received a renewed impetus as a result of PARinAC. Different possibilities for utilizing IRENE are being pursued, such as enhancing electronic mail communication with NGOs on various electronic networks, developing electronic networking with an increasing number of refugee and human rights information centres worldwide, and hosting some of the CDR databases to allow on-line access.

21. UNHCR has begun to test the potential of IRENE as a viable conduit for collection of information for early warning with NGOs and other local observers already connected to electronic networks. In addition to information, and in order to share ideas and avoid duplication, contacts have been developed with both United Nations and non-United Nations agencies and individuals engaged in development of early warning systems. As proposed in the Oslo Plan of Action, ways to structure the flow of early warning information from local observers to UNHCR are being explored. UNHCR has taken initiatives to provide development assistance and training courses in documentation to NGOs. It is planned that the CDR database training will be a regular feature of protection training courses, which will in turn allow for widespread knowledge and use of the databases as a protection tool. The CDR is currently undertaking these activities within existing resources, additional resources will be needed to ensure their continuity.

22. Effective protection and assistance to refugee women and children were a predominant issue in the PARinAC discussions. The Plan of Action stresses the need for UNHCR and NGO staff to ensure that the needs of vulnerable groups, and in particular, women and children, are incorporated in all aspects of planning and implementation of protection and assistance programmes. The implementation of this proposal is contingent upon the provision of appropriate training for field staff to enable them to ensure that activities are gender sensitive and target the needs of the most vulnerable among the refugees. UNHCR's People Oriented Planning (POP) training strategy for 1994-5 focuses on the adaptation of the training to local needs. By encouraging an indigenous training capacity, the course will be more accessible to local NGOs and will benefit from adaptation to local experience.

23. Considerable concern was expressed during the PARinAC process regarding the rise of xenophobia and racism in host countries, and the need to increase public awareness about the plight of refugees. Public information is a central tool in reversing such trends. UNHCR is committed to maximizing the use of the media, schools, youth groups and NGOs to increase public awareness of and support for the refugee cause and to combat racism and xenophobia. Print and broadcast material is being regularly provided to NGOs. Additional resources will be needed to make available public information material systematically among NGOs at the national, regional and international levels, and most importantly, to make these materials available in appropriate languages.

24. The vast and difficult challenges facing the international consortia dealing with the uprooted victims of persecution and violence, call urgently for the strengthening of UNHCR's links with NGOs in all sectors of humanitarian action. The wide-range of proposals contained in the Oslo Plan of Action rest on the conviction that adequate responses to future humanitarian problems are contingent

upon improved cooperation and coordination with non-governmental agencies. This is a two-way process which requires substantial investment of human and financial resources on both sides. The agenda set forth in the Oslo Plan of Action requires broadening the range of actors in humanitarian action, as well as additional financial support and, in some cases, the direct support of other United Nations agencies, inter-governmental organizations, financial and development institutions and Governments. The Executive Committee will be kept abreast of the actions UNHCR and NGOs undertake, following an in-depth region-by-region evaluation in each region of the PARinAC recommendations.